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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 000130

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: PRESS STIFLED IN ALTANTUYA MURDER TRIAL OVER
MENTION OF PRIME MINISTER

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 73
[1](#)B. 07 KUALA LUMPUR 291

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark
for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

[1](#)1. (C) In the latest turn of the ongoing Altantuya murder trial (reftels), accused political insider Abdul Razak Baginda, who has remained calm and composed through most of the proceedings, unleashed an emotional tirade shortly after the February 20 noon recess on the trial's 90th day. Referring to the Prime Minister by his nick-name "Pak Lah", Razak reportedly exclaimed: "You can die, Pak Lah! (in Malaysian - "Matilah kau, Pak Lah!") I'm innocent!", according to unpublished journalist accounts. Local newspapers and the government news service Bernama reported the fact of the outburst, but did not print Razak's statements. The short-lived exception was the English language newspaper The Sun, which included the quotations from Razak in its early morning February 21 edition. Sources at newspaper confirmed to us in confidence that the Ministry of Internal Security compelled The Sun to withdraw and recall thousands of copies of their first run paper in which the original quote was included. Prime Minister Abdullah serves concurrently as Minister of Internal Security.

[1](#)2. (C) Razak Baginda, who is on trial for abetting two police officers in murdering Mongolian Altantuya Shaariibuu, had appeared uneasy throughout the morning session of court on February 20. Razak's father, Abdullah Malim Baginda had whispered something to him shortly before the trial had begun for the morning and apparently upset the accused. Razak had remained quiet throughout the morning hearings, but just after the noon recess was called and as he was leaving the courtroom he kicked and banged the door and yelled "You can die, Pak Lah! Die, Pak Lah! I am innocent. I am innocent." He was later seen crying before his lawyer while his mother attempted to comfort him.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: Speculation is rife in Malaysia's on-line community concerning what it was that set off Razak Baginda outburst, including conspiracy theories alleging the Prime Minister's office had urged Razak to implicate Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (see also ref B) in return for sparing Razak a guilty verdict and its mandatory death sentence. Regardless, the Internal Security Ministry would want to limit any possibly inflammatory reference to the Prime Minister at the trial, and particularly at this juncture due to the proximity of Malaysia's general election to be held on March 8. Any connection between the Prime Minister and the murder trial would be scandalous. The GOM reportedly has worked hard to "drive (the case) from public view" (ref B) and is not about to allow the case to influence the coming elections.

KEITH